

# Ecstasy – All the Rave

ASAP Education Coordinator

From \$20 to \$35 a pop.

That's the going rate for Ecstasy, the new psychedelic drug rapidly replacing LSD within America's culture. Featured at "raves" -- parties ranging from informal, all-night dances in local communities to elaborate, three-day drug festivals in larger cities -- Ecstasy's popularity continues to skyrocket.

"It's out there. And we're out there with it," noted a CW2, CID Special Agent and Chief of Fort Riley's Drug Suppression Team. "It's seen as a kind of non-threatening social activity, and many soldiers don't even consider it a drug," he explained. Although lagging far behind marijuana and methamphetamines as "drugs of choice" in the area, Lemke pointed to the recent, rapid increase in Ecstasy among both military and college populations as distinct warning signs. "You'll even see soldiers in car pools headed for raves in Lincoln, Lawrence and Kansas City," he added, noting that some have traveled as far as Chicago and upper Iowa after obtaining passes from their units to attend "festivals." While stressing that no evidence of rave parties on the installation has ever developed, Lemke pointed to the effective use of computers to facilitate the rave culture with "roving" websites that post dates and locations, then quickly disappear from view.

Ecstasy is one of a variety of drugs known as "club drugs" whose novelty has contributed to their recent surge in popularity among young Americans. Too many high school and college students, together with many young military enlisted, choose to believe these drugs -- still relatively new -- are safe, simply because their negative effects have not yet been widely reported. In the same manner, rave parties are commonly promoted as "safe" activities because "no alcohol or drugs" are available.

A psychedelic, similar to marijuana but with the addition of powerful, synthetic stimulants, Ecstasy (the chemical name is MDMA) is offered in the guise of a "social experience" -- a "safe" drug that offers intense feelings of peaceful tranquility combined with soaring energy. The "Hug Drug" and "Lovers' Speed" -- two more street names -- suggest feelings of emotional closeness, the drug's sexual selling point.

Taken orally in tablets or capsules, users feel the effects within an hour. The drug is occasionally combined with LSD (called a "candy flip"), marijuana and even methamphetamines. While the effects normally last between three to six hours, unwanted side effects such as confusion, depression, anxiety, sleep problems, paranoia and/or panic disorder have been reported weeks after the drug was taken. In much the same manner, Dr. Eric Voth, a Topeka internal medicine and addiction specialist, worries about the drug's potential to produce dementia and serious depression -- the type of brain damage seen in Alzheimer patients.

Although no Fort Riley soldiers have died as a result of the drug, dozens of recent deaths have been recorded across the United States, including the Denver girl who died on February 2, five days after using Ecstasy at her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday party. While the drug made the girl literally crave water, it also prevented her kidneys from getting rid of liquids, thus leading directly to her death from water intoxication.

Still, some users take multiple doses -- perhaps up to 10 pills a night -- in order to enhance and prolong the effects. Taken at a rave or a club where there is physical exertion, body temperatures can soar to dangerous levels. By flooding the brain with serotonin, Ecstasy has sent users to hospital emergency rooms with temperatures reaching 110 degrees after dancing -- and collapsing -- at raves. And, while no Fort Riley soldiers have yet died as a result of the drug, dozens of recent deaths have been recorded across the United States.

Law enforcement sources on the installation are well aware of Ecstasy's growing popularity. "We've had a few soldiers selling, some soldiers using ('rolling'), but the whole rave culture just continues to grow within the drug community," one official warned. While local military and civilian law enforcement agencies, including Lemke's team, continue their daily tactics against the realities of drug supply-and-demand dynamics in the northeastern Kansas region, even professionals frequently underestimate the impact of today's drug culture. "We even have MP's, now members of our Drug Suppression Team, who say they're amazed at the extent of drug use in the area," Lemke added. He emphasized the critical need for a consistently aggressive, random-testing protocol in the face of Ecstasy's increasing popularity. Commanders must test frequently, avoid predictable testing patterns (such as testing at the same time each month), and make absolutely certain that all members of their unit -- including the senior enlisted -- are tested.

Finally, despite the prohibitive price, soldiers manage to find the money to support the economics of Ecstasy. Lemke pointed to the stereotype of a typical, chronically broke young soldier, living in the barracks and taking home between \$800 to \$900 a month. Because the military money is there, he explained, so are the drugs. "Drive down an alley, hold out a twenty-dollar bill, and someone's there, asking what you want."

Central Intelligence Division (C.I.D.) offers a convenient and discreet "Source Program" for persons wanting to provide any information concerning drug use, manufacture or distribution, but who want to protect their identities. "They can call 785-239-3188/3317, or simply come to Building 406."

For prevention training on Ecstasy and other club drugs, military units can contact the Substance Abuse Program's Education Coordinator (785-239-4758) or the Soldier Risk Reduction Program (785-239-9435).